



*"The National Park Service is dedicated to improving the way you enjoy this special place."*

# YOSEMITE

## NATIONAL PARK

*"When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe."*

— John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra*, 1869

## PLANNING UPDATE

Volume 25

August 2003

Dear Yosemite Friends,

Before your neighbor begins a construction project, does he or she listen for the presence of migrant songbirds so as not to disturb their breeding season? In Yosemite National Park, wildlife biologists do this and more. As we move into the construction phase on a number of improvement efforts, one aspect is abundantly clear: a national park is not your typical work site. Stringent protection measures are enforced to preserve plants and wildlife, rivers and streams, cultural and archeological sites, and the experience of our visitors.



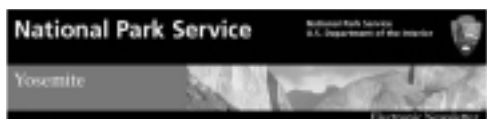
In this edition of the *Planning Update*, you will learn some of the steps park managers take to protect Yosemite's special values during construction. You will also find out about the latest progress at the Lower Yosemite Fall area, as the visitor experience at this world-renowned destination is transformed.

The National Park Service is dedicated to improving the way you enjoy this special place. While construction is underway over the course of the next several years, visitors will continue to have access to all of the park's major destination areas.

The *Yosemite Valley Plan* established a vision for the Valley's future that is becoming a reality today. National parks were set aside so that people will always be able to enjoy the nation's treasures in ways that will preserve them into the future. The important work outlined in the *Yosemite Valley Plan*—and throughout the operation of the park—represents a greater choreography of protection, in this place that we are borrowing from the generations to come.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Tollefson  
Park Superintendent



## E-NEWS DEBUTS

Beginning in early September, Yosemite National Park will distribute an email newsletter to interested members of the public. This exciting new communication tool will enable the National Park Service to keep the public apprised of the latest news in Yosemite—from park planning efforts to current events and the latest road information.

To sign up for this free publication, log on to the park's web site at [www.nps.gov/yose](http://www.nps.gov/yose) or send your email address to:

**[Yose\\_Planning@nps.gov](mailto:Yose_Planning@nps.gov)**

All email addresses are confidential; the National Park Service will not share this mailing list with other entities. If you have requested to be removed from the *Planning Update* mailing list, it will become effective with the fall 2003 issue.

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*Kristina Rylands edited this issue with contributions from Elexis Mayer, Sara Jennings, Jeannette Simons, and Chris Zinda.*

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# Measures For Success

A number of park improvement efforts are finally entering into the construction phase. Even before a shovel ever meets dirt, park staff—led by biologists, hydrologists, archeologists, etc.—conduct exhaustive studies in order to protect and preserve Yosemite's natural, cultural, and social resources. If a particular resource may be affected by construction, protective measures (known as "mitigation measures") are put into place. These measures are spelled out in a project's environmental compliance documents (environmental assessments or environmental impact statements), and they are written into all construction contracts.

Construction in Yosemite National Park is held to a high standard. Before crews get to work, they are made well aware that this is not the same as a job site at home. The National Park Service is entrusted with protecting Yosemite's natural and cultural resources while allowing for visitor enjoyment. As a result, protection measures are taken before, during, and after a project.

Here are a few examples of the mitigation measures that must be followed in Yosemite National Park:

## BEFORE

**ASSESSING TERRITORY** Months before construction is expected to begin, teams of park staff survey the immediate project area. Wildlife biologists look in trees for bird nests and bat roosting areas, which helps contractors schedule activity around wildlife breeding seasons. Reviews of park records and on-site surveys help determine if any rare, threatened, or endangered species are likely to be present, requiring special considerations. Botanists and archeologists assess the project area to verify sensitive vegetation, habitats, and archeological sites. Teams then mark areas in need of special protection, sometimes using brightly colored fencing, which alerts construction crews of places to avoid.

**TRAINING NEW WORKERS** Upon arrival to the construction site, crew members receive training provided by National Park Service staff. Workers learn to avoid special resource areas or features. They also are made aware of park regulations and the strict environmental protection measures that must be followed, along with safety procedures to protect park visitors and employees.

**PROTECTING NATIVE PLANTS** The seeds and spores of non-native plant species can enter the park on the wheels of any vehicle. To prevent the spread of invasive plants, most construction equipment is cleaned and inspected each time it enters Yosemite. Additionally, backfill material brought into the park must be certified "weed free," which means that the dirt has been sterilized and is free of seeds and spores.

## DURING

**ASSURING VISITOR ACCESS** As construction gets underway, visitors will have access to all of the park's major destinations. Most activities occur during the business day and will be scheduled to minimize disruption to day visitors and overnight guests at park lodgings and campgrounds. To the greatest extent

possible, construction bulletins will be circulated to park visitor centers and gateway communities, alerting visitors to possible detours or traffic delays. For increased safety, informational and directional signs will be clearly posted to ensure safe pedestrian and vehicle circulation.



**SPOTTED BAT**  
(*Euderma maculatum*)

There are 17 species of bats in Yosemite National Park, 9 of which are species of concern. Whenever possible, work in the park is scheduled so as not to interfere with breeding and nesting seasons of Yosemite's wildlife.

**PROTECTING NATURAL RESOURCES** Construction equipment must be carefully maintained while in the park. Measures are taken to catch leaks and prevent accidental spills of oil and hydraulic fluids. Crews often conduct perimeter checks to make sure that wildlife is not trapped in excavated areas. Protective fencing and catchment basins are placed in and near streams or watercourses to prevent sediments and other material from entering rivers or wetlands. Air quality is protected by covering loose material hauled in trucks and by wetting down temporary access roads to help control dust.

**REMOVING DEBRIS** All debris generated during construction is placed in separate dumpsters to be recycled or otherwise removed from the park by the contractor. Crews also must adhere to park food storage regulations to help protect Yosemite's wildlife, using food lockers and bear-proof trash dumpsters within the construction site.

## AFTER

**REHABILITATING THE SITE** Once a project is near completion, the site is restored to the greatest extent possible. Park staff conduct a final inspection and verify that signs of construction largely have been erased. Afterwards, ecological restoration teams—made up of park staff and vegetation specialists—revegetate the area using native plants and soils to help return the area to a more natural state. For up to two years after construction, the site will be monitored to ensure the success of these restoration efforts.

### CONSTRUCTION SCHEDULED TO BEGIN

#### Fall 2003

Cascades Diversion Dam Removal in Yosemite Valley  
Yosemite Valley Shuttle Bus Stop Improvements  
East Yosemite Valley Utilities Improvements  
Curry Village Employee Housing  
Flood-Damaged Office Building Replacement in El Portal  
South Fork Bridge Removal in Wawona

#### Spring 2004

Improvements at Curry Village & East Yosemite Valley Campgrounds  
Yosemite Lodge Area Redevelopment

## Protecting the Past

Yosemite National Park contains many archeological sites, manifesting thousands of years of human occupation. As part of the National Park Service mission, the park is committed to the protection and preservation of Yosemite's human history.

During ground disturbing activity (due to construction, trail building, and routine maintenance and operations activities), archeological monitors are present in areas considered to potentially contain prehistoric or historic remains of American Indian culture.

In the event that archeological deposits or artifacts are discovered during ground disturbance, ground disturbing work in the area must be relocated until field monitors can investigate. If human remains are inadvertently discovered, ground disturbance work in the vicinity is stopped, and the associated tribes are contacted in accordance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.



NPS Photo

**Lucy Telles and Traditional Basket**  
(Miwok/Paiute), circa 1930s

The Yosemite region has been home to American Indian people for as many as 6,000 years. The park continues to play an important role in the lives of contemporary Indian people for its historical, spiritual, and cultural significance.

## East Yosemite Valley Utilities Improvement Plan

An environmental assessment on this project was released for public comment on July 18 and closed on August 17, 2003. Formerly entitled the Yosemite Valley Integrated Utilities Master Plan, this project will allow the park to design and construct utility systems in the eastern portion of Yosemite Valley that provide adequate service to existing facilities, as well as those called for in the *Yosemite Valley Plan*. At the same time, attention will be devoted to minimizing environmental impacts, removing and rerouting outdated utilities, and allowing for restoration of sensitive ecological areas.

## Lower Yosemite Fall Project

See article on page 6.

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## OPEN SOON FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

## Yosemite Lodge Area Redevelopment\*

Site designs for this project will be evaluated in an environmental assessment scheduled for release for public comment in early September. If approved, on-the-ground activity at Yosemite Lodge is anticipated to begin in spring of 2004.

## Cascades Diversion Dam Removal

A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was signed on May 16, 2003, which determines that the dam removal (as analyzed in its environmental assessment) will not significantly affect the quality of the Merced Wild and Scenic River. Copies of decision documents are available online at [www.nps.gov/yose/planning](http://www.nps.gov/yose/planning). Removal of the Cascades Diversion Dam will help restore the hydrologic processes and the free-flowing condition of the Merced Wild and Scenic River. Demolition is expected to begin in the fall of 2003, with removal completed in the spring of 2004.

Cascades  
Diversion  
Dam

Ribbon Fall

Devils Elbow

El Capitan  
Picnic Area

Main Stem Merced River

Bridalveil  
Fall

Cathedral  
Beach

## Improved Shuttle Bus Stops

In order to improve the experience of nearly 2.5 million annual passengers on Yosemite Valley's shuttle system, construction of new bus stops and shelters will begin this October. Stops will eventually include wayfinding signs, as well as information on interpretive opportunities in the area. The first stops to be included in this *Yosemite Valley Plan* project will be those at the Valley Visitor Center, Sentinel Bridge, Happy Isles, and Mirror Lake. Later in 2004, the second phase of construction will include improvements to stops at the Village Store, Degnan's Complex, LeConte Memorial Lodge, new Curry Village employee housing area, and The Ahwahnee.

## Ecological Report for

The National Park Service is preparing an ecological restoration plan that will increase recreation opportunities. As an appendix to the plan, the results of the public comment process on the *Yosemite Valley Plan* will be included. The plan will address campgrounds at Upper Yosemite Falls, these areas would be managed for interpretive, and experiencing the park. [www.nps.gov/yose/planning](http://www.nps.gov/yose/planning)



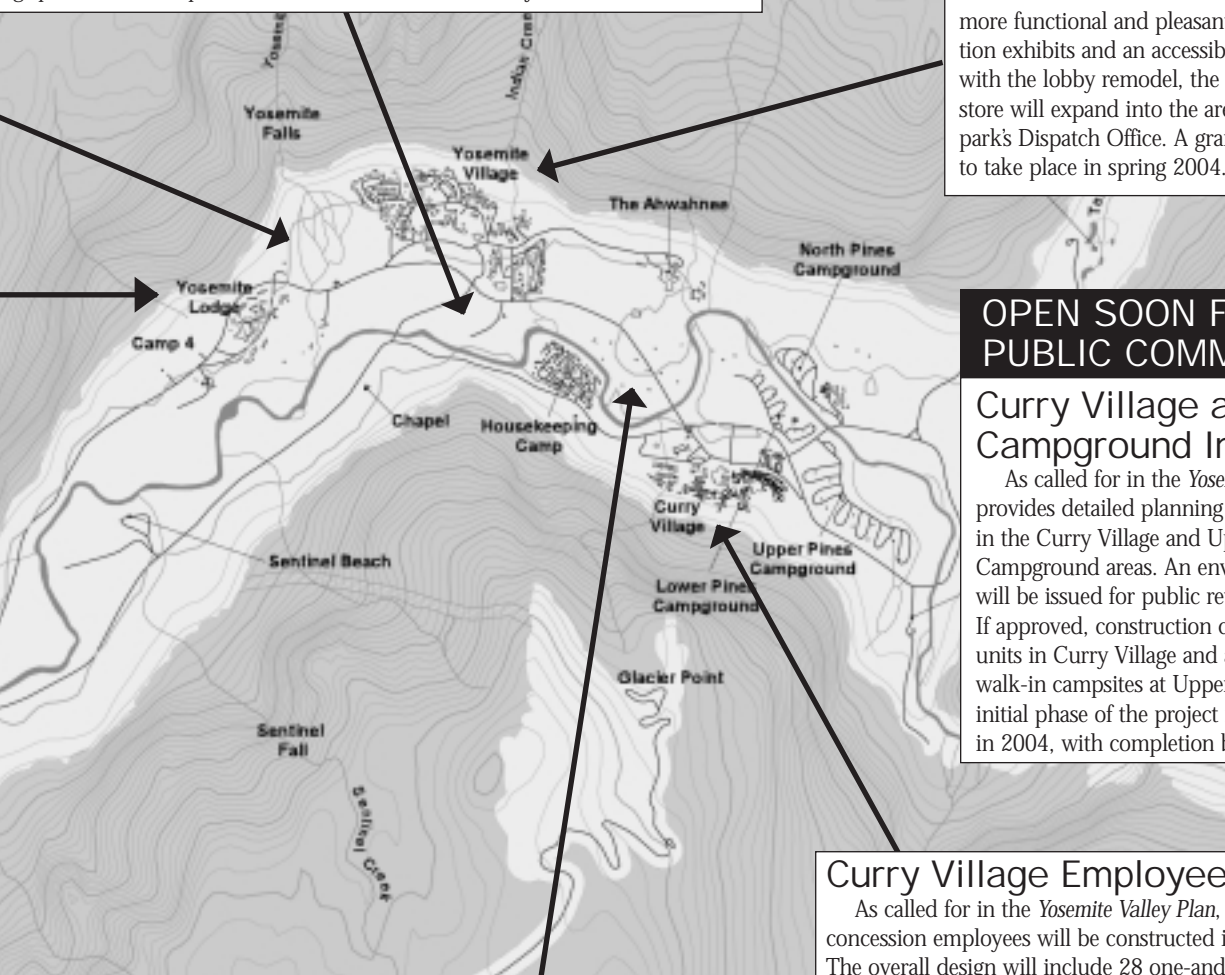
# in Yosemite Valley

## Yosemite Village Parking Area Improvements

Beginning this summer, the main parking area at Yosemite Village has undergone major improvements. New pedestrian paths provide safer and more direct access to the parking area. The driving loop of the parking area was paved to help reduce dust, and the lot is being expanded to accommodate up to 80 additional vehicles. During the busy summer months, traffic attendants have helped guide motorists to parking spaces, and an express shuttle bus takes visitors directly to the Visitor Center.

## Valley Visitor Center Remodel

Beginning in early October, the Valley Visitor Center information desk and bookstore will move to the Wilderness Center, located between The Ansel Adams Gallery and the post office. This temporary relocation will be in effect while the Visitor Center lobby receives a much-needed facelift. The improved lobby will be a more functional and pleasant space, with new orientation exhibits and an accessible information desk. Along with the lobby remodel, the Yosemite Association bookstore will expand into the area formerly used as the park's Dispatch Office. A grand reopening is expected to take place in spring 2004.



## OPEN SOON FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

## Curry Village and East Valley Campground Improvements\*

As called for in the *Yosemite Valley Plan*, this project provides detailed planning for a variety of projects in the Curry Village and Upper and Lower Pines Campground areas. An environmental assessment will be issued for public review in September 2003. If approved, construction can begin on 10 new guest units in Curry Village and additional drive-to and walk-in campsites at Upper Pines Campground. The initial phase of the project is anticipated to begin early in 2004, with completion by the end of the year.

## Restoration and Visitor Experience in East Yosemite Valley

NPS has completed a report refining the goals and objectives for restoration projects in east Yosemite Valley. In addition to exploring options for restoration opportunities, scientists from various disciplines contributed to the report. As a preliminary public scoping summary presents the findings of the report, a preliminary public scoping period, held during the spring of 2003. As called for in the *Yosemite Valley Plan*, this project would restore to natural conditions the flood-damaged upper and lower river and a portion of lower pines. Once restored, the area would be an ideal site for visitors to enjoy hiking, nature study, fishing, picnicking, and enjoying the area's natural quiet. This report can be viewed online at [www.nps.gov/yose/planning](http://www.nps.gov/yose/planning).

## Curry Village Employee Housing

As called for in the *Yosemite Valley Plan*, a housing area for concession employees will be constructed in Curry Village. The overall design will include 28 one- and two-story buildings, which will be in keeping with the architectural character of the historic Camp Curry area. Compliance for this project was accomplished with the *Yosemite Valley Plan* and design is now underway. Construction on this project is scheduled to begin this fall, with completion late in 2004.

\*To request planning documents for review, fill out and return the coupon on the back of this newsletter. These will also be available on the park's web site at [www.nps.gov/yose/planning](http://www.nps.gov/yose/planning).

## Yosemite Fire Management Plan\*

Fire season in Yosemite National Park is well underway as park staff complete the *Yosemite Fire Management Plan* and its *Final Environmental Impact Statement*. Over 200 public comments were received on the *Draft Environmental Impact Statement*. Those comments have been analyzed and are helping to shape the development of the final plan, which is expected to be released in fall 2003.

Some of the changes between the draft and final documents for the preferred alternative come as a result of public comment, including the following:

- A reduction in the number of wildland urban interface areas (developed areas in the park).
- A reduction in the maximum diameter for the mechanical thinning of trees.
- A limit placed on thinning for forest restoration within the wildland urban interface areas. Any thinning proposed outside of wildland urban interface areas will be subject to a separate public review process, in keeping with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Once a Record of Decision is signed, the *Yosemite Fire Management Plan* will be implemented. This document, like all fire management plans in the National Park Service, must be completed by December of 2004.

## Progress at Lower Yosemite Fall

This year, great strides have been made to improve the visitor experience at Lower Yosemite Fall—and much of the work is easily recognizable.

Last April, the parking lot at Lower Yosemite Fall was closed permanently, and vehicles are now redirected to the day-use parking area at Yosemite Village. Currently, construction of a new restroom facility and shuttle bus stop is underway which will more adequately accommodate the area's high level of visitation. The former parking lot will be restored to natural conditions and visitors will enjoy an informal picnic and seating area placed nearby.

The two major trails leading to base of Lower Yosemite Fall are also experiencing redevelopment, including efforts to make them accessible to disabled visitors. The eastern trail (from just beyond the base of the Lower Fall) is under reconstruction. Granite edging and locations for wayside exhibits have been installed. A raised boardwalk will soon be constructed near the site of the old Hutchings' sawmill, where a young John Muir once worked and diverted water from Yosemite Creek. Another boardwalk will be placed nearby to protect the braided stream system. In addition to the boardwalks, footbridges will be removed and some replaced to improve the hydrology of the braided stream system, and a path will be laid to reduce damage to creekside areas and the adjacent forest floor. The western trail, while still in use, is receiving up to one hundred feet of new stone edging per day. Once trail work is completed on the eastern trail and it is opened in its entirety, foot traffic along the western half of the loop will be rerouted to accommodate its final improvements. Through all phases of this trail work, visitors will continue to have access to either the main viewing area or the bridge at the base of Lower Yosemite Fall.

By the end of the year, crews hope to complete the new footbridges, restroom, shuttle bus stop, main viewing terrace at the base of Lower Yosemite Fall, and much of the stone edging on the western trail. They also anticipate removing any designated bridges and rehabilitating the main bridge at the base of the Lower Fall.

Completion of the entire project is anticipated for 2004. Financial support for this effort comes from a partnership between the National Park Service and The Yosemite Fund, a nonprofit partner. When visiting the Lower Yosemite Fall area, check out the displays that describe the project and The Yosemite Fund's donation campaign, or visit [www.yosemitfund.org](http://www.yosemitfund.org).



Photo by Sara Jennings

### EASTERN TRAIL

Work on the eastern loop of the Lower Yosemite Fall trail will be completed by the end of this year.

# Outside Yosemite Valley

## Replacing Flood-Damaged Valley Offices in El Portal

The *Yosemite Valley Plan* calls for the construction of a new office building in El Portal that will replace offices lost or damaged in Yosemite Valley during the 1997 flood. The new building will be a two-story office addition to the west end of the National Park Service Warehouse Complex in El Portal. Environmental compliance was completed as part of the *Yosemite Valley Plan*. Construction is expected to begin fall 2003 with completion in winter/spring 2004.

## OPEN SOON FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

### Seventh-Day Adventist Camp Land Exchange\*

This project involves a land exchange between the National Park Service and Mariposa County at the site of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church's "Camp Wawona." The project would move development away from the adjacent Yosemite Wilderness boundary, and the area of the camp would be restored to natural conditions. Mariposa County is the lead agency for this project and is preparing a combined environmental impact report (under the California Environmental Quality Act) and environmental assessment (under the National Environmental Policy Act). Release of this document for public comment is scheduled for October 2003. For more information, visit [www.mariposacounty.org/planning/majorprojects/SDA](http://www.mariposacounty.org/planning/majorprojects/SDA).

## Mark Your Calendar

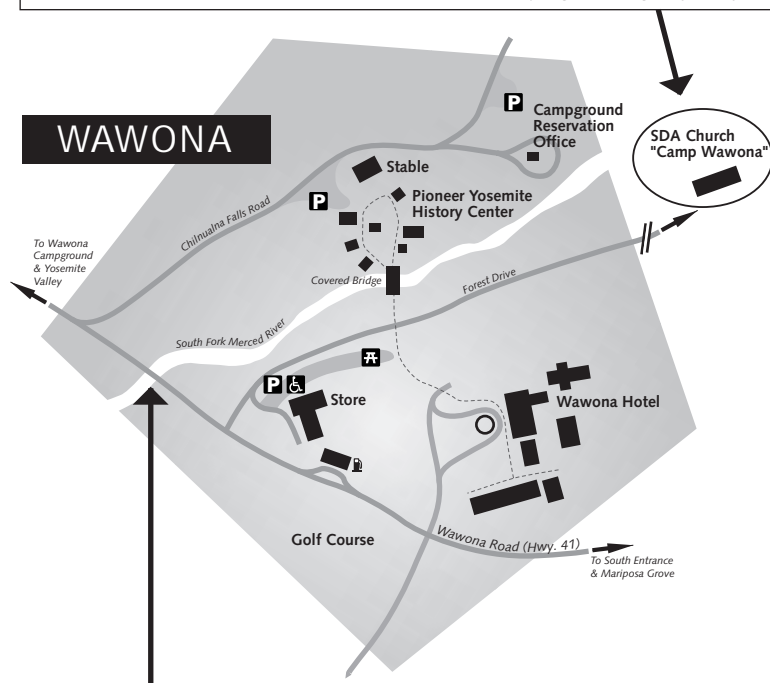
When it comes to planning for Yosemite's future, the National Park Service believes that the voices of the public are vital. At regularly scheduled open houses, visitors, employees, and interested members of the public can get up-to-the-minute information on a number of improvement projects occurring throughout Yosemite National Park.

Park staff and project managers are available to answer questions, listen to concerns, and accept written comments. So far this year, nearly 1,000 individuals have participated!

Mark your calendar now for future Open Houses. Check on the park's web site for locations and times.

- ☐ August 27
- ☐ September 24
- ☐ October 22
- ☐ November 19

[www.nps.gov/yose/planning](http://www.nps.gov/yose/planning)



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## South Fork Merced River Bridge Replacement

A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was signed on July 24, 2003. This determination finds that the bridge replacement (as analyzed in its environmental assessment) will not significantly affect the quality of the South Fork of the Merced Wild and Scenic River. The National Park Service proposes to remove and replace the South Fork Merced River Bridge, which spans the river in Wawona. This project also calls for the removal of a temporary bypass bridge which was installed after the 1997 flood. An environmental assessment was released in April 2003 and the public comment period closed on May 29. Removal of the South Fork Bridge is expected to begin during the period of low water in the fall of 2003. The replacement bridge is expected to be completed by the end of 2004.

To help keep costs down,  
you are encouraged to  
view planning documents  
online by visiting  
[www.nps.gov/yose/planning](http://www.nps.gov/yose/planning)



Photo by Chamberlin/Kodak

## Stay Involved!

If you would like to receive a copy of planning documents for review, please check the boxes below that apply. **If you have already requested one of these documents, you do not need to submit another request.**

- ☐ *Yosemite Lodge Area Redevelopment Environmental Assessment*  
(Open for review September 2003)
- ☐ *Curry Village & East Yosemite Valley Campground Improvements Environmental Assessment*  
(Open for review September 2003)
- ☐ *Environmental Education Campus Development/Draft Environmental Impact Statement*  
(Open for review fall 2003)
- ☐ *Yosemite Fire Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement*  
(Open for review fall 2003)

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- Email your request to: [yose\\_planning@nps.gov](mailto:yose_planning@nps.gov)
  - Fill out & mail coupon to: Yosemite Planning  
P. O. Box 577  
Yosemite National Park, CA 95389
  - Fax this coupon to: (209) 379-1294
  - Phone in your request to: (209) 379-1365

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*Thanks for your help!*